PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS*

MALCOLM GOODRIDGE

I HAVE a very full understanding of the responsibility I have assumed, in accepting the great honor you have accorded me, in electing me your President.

I am acutely aware of my own inadequacy to meet the standards set by my illustrious predecessors in this office. However, humility is a solid foundation for virtue, and the very realization of my limitations is a challenge to my sense of pride; so I put all my fears behind me, and assure you I am entering upon my new duties with a spirit of determination and enthusiasm which, with your help, will overcome what at first seemed to be insurmountable handicaps.

I know eulogy is distasteful to Dr. Hartwell, because he has told me so; nevertheless, I cannot refrain from saying a word about him tonight. I have spent some time recently, studying the history of the Academy. All of the addresses of its Presidents, up to and including 1879, that are to be found, and many of those delivered since then, I have read, so I have acquired knowledge, not only of the authors of those addresses, but also of their opinions of their contemporaries.

I have known Dr. Hartwell as a man, as a friend, as a patient, and as a physician; I have known him also as President of the Academy and as its Director, so I speak with authority, when I tell you that in all its ninety-odd years of existence this Academy has never had a person connected with its organization who has given to it more of himself and given to better advantage.

He has taught me many things that cannot be learned from books. He has always had the capacity for making friends. In him you find kindness, truth, patience, and honor. He has been a wise and inspiring leader. We are going to miss him; but, long after our generation has passed on, his spirit will continue to live in the affairs of the Academy, more indestructible than its walls, and vastly more precious.

Nearly a hundred years ago, on the evening of November 18, 1846, at the Fourth Annual Dinner of the Society for the Relief of Widows and Orphans of Medical Men, held at a restaurant on Broadway, near

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Prince Street, the idea of an Academy of Medicine was born. This was indeed the horse-and-buggy age, not only of medicine, but of science in general. Let me remind you that the population of what is now the Greater City of New York was in the neighborhood of six hundred thousand; the first railroad train drawn by a steam locomotive, the first Atlantic crossing of a steam-propelled ship, and the use of illuminating gas as a means of street-lighting had been introduced but a few years before the founding of the Academy, while the first commercial telegraph line in this country was operated between Washington and Baltimore in 1844. Oliver Wendell Holmes reported the infectious nature of puerperal sepsis in 1843; and three years later, but a single month before the birth of the Academy, William T. G. Morton demonstrated the administration of ether to a patient on whom John C. Warren was about to operate, in the amphitheatre of Massachusetts General Hospital.

The prime motive for the formation of the Academy was not at this time the advancement of medical science, but rather the formation of a code of ethics to regulate the professional conduct of its members. The original Constitution, adopted January 6, 1847, reads, under Article 2, "The objects of the Academy shall be:

"First. The separation of the Regular from Irregular Practitioners.

"Second. The association of the Profession Proper for purposes of mutual recognition and fellowship.

"Third. The promotion of the character, interests, and honor of the fraternity, by maintaining the union and harmony of the regular profession of the City and its vicinity, and aiming to elevate the standard of Medical Education.

"Fourth. The cultivation and advancement of the Science, by our united exertions for mutual improvement, and our contributions to Medical Literature."

So we see the Academy was originally started, not primarily as an institution for the benefit of mankind, but rather as an organization of one hundred twenty-one medical men whose chief aim was to draw the line sharply between regular practitioners and those whom they regarded as charlatans and humbugs.

The Standing Committees under the original Constitution were appointed by the President, and were a Committee on Admission, a Committee on Finance, a Committee on Medical Ethics, a Committee on Publication, and a Council of Appeal—in keeping with the objectives

stated in the original Constitution.

A year later, however, the order of the stated objects was changed, so that the cultivation and advancement of the Science, by united exertions for mutual improvement, and contributions to medical literature was placed in the leading position, while the separation of regular from irregular practitioners was relegated to third place.

In 1874, the "Promotion of Public Health" was added to the objects of the Academy.

Throughout the first twenty-eight years of its existence, the Academy of Medicine had no home. During most of this time, its small collection of books had no permanent resting place. On the occupancy of a building at 12 West 31 Street, in May, 1875, the Academy finally had a roof over its head. There were available for the Library four hundred volumes, and in June, 1875, a Committee on Library was added to the Standing Committees. From the time we occupied our first home up to the present time, we have been leaders in matters which affect public welfare and medical education. The Library increased rapidly in size until there were nine thousand volumes on its shelves in 1879, and twenty-five thousand in 1885.

The greatly beloved Abraham Jacobi had the vision, in 1885, to point out that the people would soon learn to rely on the knowledge and public spirit of the profession, and, as it depended on the Bar for legal advice, would consult the medical profession for sanitary necessities.

About this time, a bill was presented to the Legislature, ordering a Board of Examiners to institute State examinations, and a department to license practitioners of medicine; and the Academy of Medicine was the motivating force in finally securing such legislation.

Continued rapid expansion produced the need for larger quarters, and on November 20, 1890, a new building was opened, at 17 West 43 Street. Oliver Wendell Holmes is reputed to have said, in a letter of regret, written for this occasion, "Academies have been too often thought of as places of honorable retirement and dignified ease; roosts where Emeritus Professors and effete men of letters, once cocks of the walk, could sit in quiet rows while the fighting, the clucking and the crowing were going on beneath them . . . But the Academy which fulfils its true function is a working body. It deals with living subjects, it handles unsettled questions; . . . it offers rewards for meritorious performances and sits in judgment on the efforts of aspirants for distinction. It furnishes

the nearest approach we can expect to a fixed standard of excellence by which the work of new hands and the new work of old hands can be judged . . . There are a certain number of squinting brains, as there are of squinting eyes among every thousand of any population . . . We trust it will always be enough for a physician to be able to say 'I am a Member of the New York Academy of Medicine!'"

A few years later, on January 22, 1897, the semicentennial was celebrated. The list of the accomplishments of the Fellows of the Academy during its first fifty years is too long to enumerate in its entirety; however, they fought for the improvement in the preliminary education of matriculants, for State examination as a standard of license to practise, for increase in the duration and number of college courses and medical school inspection; they agitated for new factory laws in behalf of women and children, for clean streets, for improvement in tenement house conditions, school houses, Reception Hospital, reformation of quarantine for the Port of New York, water supply for the city (Croton water and watershed), establishment of the Metropolitan Health Board of the city, protection of the Port of New York and the city against invasion by cholera, and for the establishment of free baths. In fact, to quote directly from Dr. Jacobi's semicentennial oration, "The responsibility toward both the public and the profession was always deeply felt by the Academy. What I could say, fragmentary though it be, should have convinced you that the best individual and collective efforts of the profession, as represented in the Academy, are being spent in the *service of the community*. [The italics are mine]

"See to it that no personal interest, vanity, or misapprehension interfere with the progress of medicine. It is through our own efforts that we overcame the lack of knowledge on the part of legislators, and the opposition of medical schools, when we enforced a certain amount of preliminary education and the establishment of State examinations. See that these, your gains, for they are yours, be not taken away from you; they were conquered in your behalf."

Lots on 43 and 44 Streets, directly adjacent to the Academy property, were purchased in 1910, because of the steady and rapid growth of the Academy's activities and Library.

The majority of us are familiar with the recent history of the Academy. To the Standing Committees on Admission and Library have been added the Committees on Public Health Relations, Medical Education,

Sections, and Fellowship, and just tonight, Medical Information. With new problems, new responsibilities have developed, which, up to the present, we have met. We moved into this building in 1926, and we have since had to build an addition for the rare book room and much needed office space. Our Library, now over two hundred twenty-four thousand books and periodicals, is growing rapidly, and we shall soon need considerable additional stack room. We are now the fourth medical library in the world, in point of size, and second only to the Army Medical Library in Washington on this hemisphere.

I have attempted to give you a brief outline of our history, as we approach our hundredth anniversary. It is a story of continued progress. There are, among our Fellows, those who think we have expanded too much and should curtail our activities. We must admit that these are troublous times, but, for my part, I am strongly in favor of continuing to be true to the traditions and ideals which have become our established principles.

During my term of office, I should like to see a quickening interest in Academy affairs evinced by a much larger proportion of Fellows and Members, especially of the younger group, for excellence in any department can be procured only by the labors of a lifetime.

It is my hope that we may stir the consciousness of the public to the significance of the Academy as a public health counsellor. We must continue our growth; Foundations have helped us appreciably because of the scope of our activities in behalf of the physician and of the public; we have an obligation to those Foundations, to keep faith with them, by carrying on in the same direction; and we have an obligation to the people, to keep faith with them, by carrying on, as they have learned to rely on us to do.

The obligations we have accepted and discharged carry with them reciprocal responsibilities. We are, after all, in the same position as other institutions of learning, both special and general; such institutions are constantly appealing for help, to maintain the forward progress of their work. We want to be in position to do better work, to meet increasing demands upon us. If we do not continue to progress, we shall not remain static; we must inevitably give up many of the things which are so important to the community at large. What we have already accomplished, we have just reason to be proud of; but from whence we came and where we are is not nearly so important at this juncture as whither we are going.